

## Message Text

PAGE 01 PHNOM 08216 090906Z

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 SSO-00 /026 W  
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P 090805Z AUG 73

FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2482  
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK PRIORITY  
AMEMBASSY SAIGON PRIORITY  
CINCPAC PRIORITY  
COMUSSAG PRIORITY  
USDEL JEC PARIS PRIORITY

S E C R E T PHNOM PENH 8216

EXDIS

E.O. 11652 GDS  
TAGS: PINT, CB  
SUBJ: NEW INTERNAL POLITICAL CRISIS

REF: PHNOM PENH 8158

1. SINCE MY RETURN I HAVE HAD MEETINGS WITH MARSHAL LON NOL (AUGUST 8) AND SIRIK MATAK (AUGUST 9), AND I HAVE ASKED FOR AN APPOINTMENT WITH PRIME MINISTER IN TAM FOR AUGUST 10. MY PRINCIPAL IMPRESSION OF DEVELOPMENTS DURING MY ABSENCE IS THAT THE MILITARY SITUATION HAS NOT ONLY STABILIZED BUT THAT THE FRIENDLIES HAVE MADE SOME PROGRESS. POLITICALLY, HOWEVER, IN TAM CONTINUES TO BE A RELUCTANT PRIME MINISTER (SEE REFTTEL AND PREVIOUS MESSAGES CONCERNING HIS PERIODIC THREATS TO RESIGN), AND THERE APPEARS TO BE AN INCREASING POSSIBILITY THAT HE WILL WITHDRAW FROM BOTH THE GOVERNMENT AND THE HIGH POLITICAL COUNCIL.

2. DURING MY CONVERSATION WITH LON NOL, HE DID NOT SEEM TO REGARD IN TAM'S RESIGNATION AS IMMINENT. HE WAS IN A GENERALLY RELAXED MOOD, EXPRESSED CONSIDERABLE CONFIDENCE THAT THE CESSATION OF COMBAT AIR OPERATIONS  
SECRET

PAGE 02 PHNOM 08216 090906Z

AUGUST 15 WILL GIVE SOME IMPETUS TO NEGOTIATIONS, AND ASKED US TO DO OUR BEST TO OBTAIN THREE ADDITIONAL ARMORED PERSONNEL CARRIER SQUADRONS FOR FANK USE (AS YOU ARE AWARE FROM OTHER MESSAGES, THERE IS A POSSIBILITY THESE COULD

BE REDEPLOYED TO CAMBODIA FROM VIETNAM). AT THE END OF OUR MEETING, HOWEVER, THE MARSHAL OBSERVED THAT IN TAM CONTINUES TO BE UNHAPPY IN HIS POSITION AND FEARFUL THAT HIS CLOSE ASSOCIATION WITH THE REGIME AS PRIME MINISTER MAY DAMAGE HIS REPUTATION AND IMPRINCE ON HIS FUTURE POLITICAL CAREER. LON NOL ASKED THAT WE DO ALL WE CAN TO PERSUADE IN TAM TO CONTINUE HIS COLLABORATION WITH THE HIGH POLITICAL COUNCIL, EVEN SHOULD HE RESIGN AS PRIME MINISTER, AND I RESPONDED THAT WE HAVE EXERCISED OUR INFLUENCE WITH HIM IN PREVIOUS SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES AND WILL DO SO AGAIN AS NECESSARY.

3. SIRIK MATAK ASKED ME TO CALL ON HIM THIS MORNING AT THE DEFENSE MINISTRY, WHERE HE WAS CHAIRING THE WEEKLY MEETING OF THE PERMANENT COUNCIL OF NATIONAL DEFENSE WHICH WOULD NORMALLY BE CHAIRED BY IN TAM AS PRIME MINISTER. MATAK SHOWED ME A HANDWRITTEN NOTE FROM IN TAM, RECEIVED AUGUST 8, IN WHICH IN TAM ALLUDED AGAIN TO HIS POOR RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE MILITARY, IN PARTICULAR MAJEN SOSTHENE FERNANDEZ, AND ANNOUNCED THAT HE HAS DECIDED TO QTE STAND ASIDE FROM UNQTE HIS MINISTERIAL FUNCTIONS WHILE AWAITING ACTION ON A LETTER OF RESIGNATION WHICH HE SAID HE HAD SUBMITTED SOME DAYS PREVIOUSLY TO MARSHAL LON NOL. IN TAM EXPRESSED THE INTENT TO RESIGN BOTH AS PRIME MINISTER AND AS A MEMBER OF THE HIGH POLITICAL COUNCIL. IN THE SAME NOTE HE ASKED SIRIK MATAK TO PRESIDE OVER THIS MORNING'S MEETING OF THE DEFENSE COUNCIL. MATAK COMMENTED THAT HE HAD DISCUSSED THIS DEVELOPMENT THIS MORNING WITH THE MARSHAL WHO SUGGESTED THAT HE INFORM ME ABOUT IT AT ONCE.

4. I REVIEWED WITH SIRIK MATAK THE VARIOUS ARGUMENTS AGAINST IN TAM'S DEPARTURE FROM THE GOVERNMENT AND THE COUNCIL, CITING THAT THE PUBLIC DISPLAY AT THIS TIME OF POLITICAL SQUABBLING COULD ONLY GIVE COMFORT TO THE OTHER SIDE, ENCOURAGE IT TO CONTINUE ITS RESISTANCE IN THE BELIEF THAT THE POLITICAL COLLAPSE OF THIS REGIME  
SECRET

PAGE 03 PHNOM 08216 090906Z

IS IMMINENT, AND DEMORALIZE THE FANK AT A TIME WHEN THEY ARE FIGHTING FOR THE SURVIVAL OF THE REPUBLIC AND ARE SHOWING SOME SIGNS OF GREATER SELF-CONFIDENCE. MATAK EXPRESSED WHOLEHEARTED AGREEMENT, BUT HE ALSO NOTED THAT IN TAM'S NERVOUSNESS ABOUT THE PRIME MINISTERSHIP IS ADVERSELY AFFECTING THE MORALE OF OTHER MINISTERS AND THE EFFICIENCY OF OTHER MINISTERS AND THE EFFICIENCY OF THE GOVERNMENT, AND HE IMPLIED THAT IN TAM'S RESIGNATION MAY EVENTUALLY BE BOTH DESIRABLE AND INEVITABLE. I RESPONDED THAT I WAS CONFIDENT THAT I COULD SPEAK FOR WASHINGTON IN STATING THAT WE WOULD GREATLY PREFER THAT THE PRESENT COLLABORATION REPRESENTED BY THE HIGH POLITICAL COUNCIL CONTINUE INDEFINITELY AND THAT IN TAM

REMAIN AS PRIME MINISTER FOR AS LONG AS HE COULD BE PERSUADED TO DO SO. IF IN TAM PROVED TO BE UNMOVEABLE ON THIS ISSUE, HE SHOULD BY ALL MEANS REMAIN A MEMBER OF THE HIGH POLITICAL COUNCIL EVEN IF HIS RESIGNATION AS PRIME MINISTER WERE TO BE ACCEPTED. I INFORMED MATAK THAT I HAD REQUESTED A MEETING WITH IN TAM AUGUST 10 AND THAT I WOULD MAKE THESE POINTS PERSONALLY TO HIM. MEANWHILE, I SUGGESTED THAT MATAK CONCERT WITH CHENG HENG ON A JOINT APPROACH OR SEPARATE DEMARCHES TO IN TAM WITH A VIEW TO PERSUADING HIM TO REMAIN IN OFFICE AT LEAST FOR ANOTHER WEEK. I SUGGESTED AN APPEAL TO IN TAMS PATRIOTISM THAT HE NOT TAKE A PRECIPITATE STEP WHICH COULD AFFECT THE SURVIVAL OF THE REPUBLIC AND AN APPEAL ALSO TO HIS VANITY AND POLITICAL STANDING THAT HE NOT TAKE A STEP WHICH COULD BE REGARDED AS SHOWING A LACK OF COURAGE AND DETERMINATION.

5. SIRIK MATAK HAS AGREED TO CONCERT WITH CHENG HENG, WHOM ENDERS WILL BE SEEING LATER THIS AFTERNOON, AND HE PROMISED TO FURNISH ME A REPORT OF THE RESULTS OF HIS CONTACT WITH IN TAM BEFORE MY OWN MEETING, AS YET UNCONFIRMED, WITH THE PRIME MINSITER TOMORROW.

6. COMMENT. WE WILL NATURALLY DO OUR BEST TO AVOID A PUBLIC POLITICAL CRISIS AT THIS DELICATE AND DANGEROUS CONJUNCTURE, BUT I SENSE THAT LON NOL AND SIRIK MATAK ARE BOTH REACHING THE END OF THEIR PATIENCE WITH IN TAM AND THAT HIS RESIGNATION AS PRIME MINISTER MAY SOONER OR LATER OCCUR. IF IT DOES, OUR EFFORTS WILL BE DIRECTED TOWARD MINIMIZING THE PUBLIC IMPACT, EXPEDITING THE FORMATION OF A NEW GOVERNMENT, AND PERSUADING IN  
SECRET

PAGE 04 PHNOM 08216 090906Z

TAM TO REMAIN ON THE HIGH POLITICAL COUNCIL. SIRIK MATAK IS PROBABLY THE MOST LIKELY SUCCESSOR BECAUSE OF HIS GENERALLY GOOD RELATIONS WITH THE MILITARY, WHOSE ROLE IS LIKELY TO BE CRITICAL OVER THE NEXT WEEKS AND MONTHS. WE WILL REPORT PROMPTLY THE FURTHER EVOLUTION OF THIS LATEST CRISIS.  
SWANK

SECRET

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**To:** STATE INFO BANGKOK  
SAIGON  
CINCPAC  
COMUSSAG  
JEC PARIS  
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